DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 117 633 CG 010 339

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TITLE Conflict, Outcome, and Perception of Women's Roles.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (83rd, Chicago, Illinois, August 30-September 2, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Females; *Graduate Students; Projective Tests; *Psychological Patterns; Psychological Studies; *Role Conflict; *Role Perception
IDENTIFIERS *Thematic Apperception Test

ABSTRACT

The study was designed to investigate perception of conflict and outcome across women's roles. A variation of the Thematic Apperception Test was used. Female graduate students (N=93) wrote stories to three pictorial cues. Each cue depicted women in a role: girl-friend/wife role, worker role, mother role. The 279 protocols (93 ss X 3 cues = 279) were coded blindly for existence of conflict and evaluation of outcome. Interrater reliability was 96 percent. Cochran's Q analyses indicate that more stories with conflict were told to the girl-friend/wife role and more stories with negative outcomes were told to the mother role cue. The results suggest that educated adult women perceive the worker role as the least problematic. Further, chi-square analyses indicate that the perceptions are independent of respondent's age, marital, or maternal status. (Author)

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ED117633

CONFLICT, OUTCOME, AND PERCEPTION OF WOMEN'S ROLES

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CONFLICT, OUTCOME, AND PERCEPTION OF WOMEN'S ROLES

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Most of the research on women's role conflict focuses on the conflict between the roles of worker and mother (Nye & Hoffman, 1963; Siegel & Hass, 1963). More recent studies on women's role conflict associated with roles or arising from role combinations focus on identifying other conflicts associated with roles or arising from role combinations (for example Hall, 1972; Gordon & Hall, 1974; Nevill & Damico, 1974). In general, the results of the research throw some light on the existence and nature of conflicts women experience and are willing to report.

The present study differs from previous research in the area of women's role conflict in two ways. First, an attempt was made to control for the difficulties inherent in self-reporting methodology. A variation of the Thematic Apperception Test technique was used in order to minimize these difficulties. Second, unlike previous research, women's perceptions of roles was considered, regardless of whether the women had experienced the roles. This enables a consideration of whether there is a similarity with respect to perception of conflict and outcome between women who have and who have not experienced a role.

Based on paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, August 1975.

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The authors thank Fredi Balzano, Lawrence Birnbach, Paul McGowan, and Bonnie Perlmutter for their assistance in pilot data collection.

The purpose of the study was to determine the existence of conflict and evaluation of outcome associated with the roles of girl-friend/wife, worker and mother. In addition, the relationship between these role perceptions and women's age, marital status, and maternal status was considered.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 93 female graduate students or recipients of a graduate degree. Most of the S s (87%) were graduate students in the School of Education at New York University. The frequency of subject characteristics in Table 1 indicate that the majority of S s are single (55%) and childless (80%). Moreover, most of the S s with children (79%) are in the oldest age range.

Insert Table 1 about here

Instrument

Most of the research on women's role conflicts is subject to the difficulties inherent in self-report measures. Therefore a variation of the Thematic Apperception Test technique was selected in order to minimize these difficulties. A total of three pictorial cues were used. The pictures are described below in the order they were administered:

(1) Girl-friend/wife role: Woman and man adjacent to each other in living room setting.

(2) Worker role: Woman sitting at paper filled desk.

(3) Mother role: Woman with young child, sex unspecified, in the background.

Development

The method for development was consistent with the guidelines for custom-built projective methods for research (Forer, Rabin, GoldStein, & Lesser 1961). The measure was developed as outlined below.

Four steps were involved in the selection and piloting of pictorial cues. First, 21 magazine pictures depicting woman alone or with people (male, male and child, child) and in two settings (home, office were selected. That is, pictures which depicted women in a variety of role and role combinations were chosen. Second, for purpose of picture selection a pilot was conducted. Ten females told stories to the pictorial cues according to standard TAT directions. Prior to piloting, the investigator knew some of the conflicts the women associated to roles. Therefore pictures which elicited these conflicts in one or all women were maintained. Generally, pictures minimal in complexity and ambiguous in both affect and activity were maintained. Third, for purpose of further picture selection, a second pilot was conducted. Two forms were developed from pictures maintained from pilot one and from additional pictures added from personal files and from a commercial picture agency. The forms had five pictures in common. The additional five pictures in each form were matched for setting and number, sex, and age of characters. Forms 1 and 2 were administered to 20 and 12 females respectively. Following, ten pictures which elicited the most material relevant to a study of role related conflicts were selected.

Finally, three pictures were selected for purposes of large scale research. That is, seven pictures depicting a combination of roles (for example, woman as mother and wife) were eliminated since scoring of these was complex and inter-rater reliability appeared difficult to achieve.

Development of Scoring System

The thematic appreciation measure was developed for purposes of comprehensive, large-scale research on women's role perceptions. Although the present paper concerns women's perceptions of conflict and outcome only, the general procedure for developing thecomprehensive scoring system is briefly explained.

The procedure for developing the scoring system is an adaptation of the method used by Schaw & Henry (1956). The initial development was based on 60 stories told by 20 S s (three pictorial cues x 20 S s = 60 stories.) Refinement of the original system was based on 219 stories told by an additional 73 S s (three pictorial cues x 73 S s = 219 stories).

The basic themes were identified from reading all stories to a given pictorial cue and noting variety of responses to the themes. The stories were analyzed without knowledge of respondent's characteristics. The scoring system is based on the recurring themes, which are more fully described in Richardson and Alpert (in Press).

For purposes of the present study two categories were coded: (1) existence of conflict (conflict, no conflict) and (2) evaluation of outcome (postitive, negative). For the first category, "conflict" was scored for stories in which a difficulty was experienced by one of the characters and the difficulty was a central part of the story, regardless of how trivial it appeared. The remaining stories were coded "no conflict".

All stories were then coded for evaluation of outcomes. "Positive" outcome was coded for story outcome which contained no negative elements, from the main character's perspective. The outcomes were either positive or uncertain. All stories coded "no conflict", as well as some stories coded "conflict" were coded "positive" outcome. "Negative" outcome was coded for story outcomes which contained negative elements from the main character's perspective.

Per cent agreement was at least 96% between coders for stories to each of the three cues. Establishment of inter-rater reliability was based on 30 stories (10 S s x 3 pictorial cues). Moreover stories were analyzed without knowledge of respondent's characteristics.

Procedure

Standard TAT instructions were used. That is, S s were asked to name the protagonist, tell what led up to the event, what the protagonist was thinking and feeling, what was happening, and how the story ended. All S s wrote stories to the mimeographed pictorial cues in test booklets. To facilitate maintenance of five minutes time limit per story, S s were asked to record "time begin" and "time end" for each story. Code numbers were used throughout testing. Following testing, S s completed a background sheet concerning demographic information.

Seventy-three S s (79%) and 20 S s (21%) responded to pictorial cues in group administration or individual administration respectively. Since stories were written rather than verbalized in both group and individual administration, it is unlikely that this difference in administration altered performance.

Results

Data relating to existence of conflict and evaluation of outcome will be dealt with first. Then data relating to the existence of conflict and evaluation of outcome as a function of respondent's age, marital status and maternal status will be considered. The content of conflict associated with each pictorial cue will be considered in the discussion section of the present paper.

The number of women whose protocols were classified "conflict" or "no conflict is shown in Table 2 for each pictorial cue.

Insert Table 2 about here

The Cochran's Q test result indicates dependence of pictorial cue and existence of conflict. Table 2 reveals that more conflictual stories were told to the pictorial cue " woman with man" than the other two pictorial cues. Further, only the pictorial cue "woman at work" resulted in more studies classified "no conflict" than "conflict".

The number of women whose protocols were classified "positive" outcome or "negative" outcome is shown in Table 3 for each pictorial cue.

Insert Table 3 here

The Cochran's Q test result indicates dependence of pictorial cue and evaluation of outcome. Table 3 reveals that more story outcomes were negative to the pictorial cue "woman with child" than the other two pictorial cues, and that respondents gave more negative than positive outcomes to this pictorial cue only. The results of Tables 2 and 3 together indicate that most of the conflictual stories to the pictorial cue "woman with man" resulted in positive outcomes, while only two of the conflictual stories told to pictorial cue "woman at work" (41-39) and five of the conflictual stories told to pictorial cue "woman with child" (65-60) had positive outcomes.

The summary results of the Chi-square analyses presented in Table 4 indicates the independence of respondent's age, marital status, and maternal status to the two coding categories at the .05 level.

Insert Table 4 about here

The existence of conflict or evaluation of outcome noted in stories does not vary sigifigantly as a function of respondent's age, marital status, or maternal status. That is, women who have experienced a role do not perceive it differently, with respect to conflict and outcome, than women who have not experienced a role.

Discussion

The results indicate that more women, the majority of whom are single and childless, perceived conflict in pictorial cue "woman with man" than in pictorial cues "woman at work" or "woman with child". Moreover,

only in pictorial cue "woman at work" was there a majority of stories that did not have conflict as its central theme. Further the results indicate that more women perceived positive outcomes in pictorial cues "woman with man" and "woman at work" than in pictorial cue "woman with child", and that only to the latter cue did women give more negative than postive outcomes. Thus the majority of stories with conflict told to pictorial cue "woman at work" have positive outcomes. While the cue "woman with child" elicited fewer conflictual stories than the "woman with man" cue, the majority of resolutions to conflict in the former cue were negative.

The assumption underlying use of the projective methodology is that perceptions are projections and that social reality directs projections. Further, use of the projective technique minimizes superficial responses and purposive distortion of responses. In that light, the data indicate that women perceive more conflict in the role of girl-friend/wife than in the role of worker and mother. Women perceive least conflict in the role of worker. In addition, the data indicate that, generally, women perceive positive resolutions to the conflict associated with girl-friend/wife role. In contrast, while women perceive less conflict associated with the role of mother, the resolutions, in general, are perceived as negative or nonexistent from the women's perspective. These results, together, suggest that educated women, the majority of whom are single and childless, perceive the worker role as the least problematic. These results are consistent with Kenniston's (Note 1) clinical data and Ross's (1968) position.

Further, the results indicate that such variables as respondent's age, marital status, and maternal status are independent of perception of conflict and outcome. Similar stories with respect to experience of conflict and evaluation of outcome are told by women, whether or not they occupy a role. That is, for example, stories told by mothers and nonmothers to the "mother with child" cue do not differ in the two dimensions investigated. In light of the Projective assumption, the data indicate that women, whether they have occupied a role, perceive certain aspects of a role similarly. It may be that women who choose to approach a role do so with a realistic expectation of the conflict and the outcome associated with that role.

An analysis of the content of conflict across pictorial cues was done, in order to throw more light on role associated conflicts. Most of the conflictual stories (60%) elicited by pictorial cue "woman with man" concerned conflict in a relationship. A smaller percentage (29%) concerned conflict experienced by the woman. That is, woman is more often perceived as nurturer to man than nurtured by man.

Conflict to the pictorial cue "woman at work" generally concerned blocks to women's success. Most of the blocks were blocks within the women themselves (63%). A minority (37%) concerned blocks created by significant others. This data seems to support that women experience more intrapsychic difficulties in relating to work than non-intrapsychic difficulties. Content analysis of the stories indicate that more of the intrapsychic difficulties concern fear of success than fear of failure. Non-intrapsychic difficulties concern barriers created by family and friends. Lastly, the majority of the conflict stories (76%) to the pictorial cue "woman with child" concerned conflicted and negative feelings about the child and boredom with the mother role.

Conflict, Outcome, and Perception
of Women's Roles

Whether men experience similar conflicts in corresponding roles or associate more conflict in their role with women than in other roles is not known. Also not known is how the results of the present investigation would vary with a less educated sample , or a sample engaged in a field traditionally considered masculine; What this study has indicated is that women who share an educational background and education as a professional field of interest, in general, perceive least conflict in the worker role and fewer positive outcomes in the maternal role, that variables such as women's age, marital status, and maternal status are independent of perception of existence of conflict or evaluating outcome, and that the nature of the conflict across roles differs.

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Table 1

Frequency of Subject Characteristics

Marital and Maternal Status	Age			
	19-24	25-30	31 and older	Total
Single				
No children	17	19	13	49
Children	0	1	1	2
Total	17	20	14	51
Married				
No children	4	11	3	18
Children	0	1	10	11
Total	4	12	13	29
Divorced/separated				
No children	2	3	2	7
Children	0	5	6	6
Total	2	5	6	13
Total	23	37	33	93

Table 2

Classification of Subject Perception

of Conflict by Pictorial Cue

	Coding Category		Cochran's Q value
Pictorial Cue	Conflict	No Conflict	Q value
Woman with man	79	14	
Woman at work	41	52	
Woman with child	65	28	37.56*

* $p < .001$

Table 3

Classification of Subject Perception

of Outcome by Pictorial Cue

	Coding Category		Cochran's Q Value
Pictorial Cue	Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome	Q value
Woman with man	56	37	
Woman at work	54	39	
Woman with child	33	60	14.54*

* $p < .001$

Table 4

Chi-Square Valves for Relationship of Respondent's Age, Marital, and Maternal Status to Coding Categories

Pictorial Cue and Coding Category	X^2 Value		
	Age	Marital	Maternal
Woman with man			
Conflict	1.12	4.98	.03
Outcome	2.93	2.74	.00
Woman at work			
Conflict	2.44	.89	1.12
Outcome	1.56	.08	.06
Woman with child			
Conflict	2.43	1.45	2.35
Outcome	2.08	4.89	6.26